

The No. 1 Choice for Mothers!

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Magazine

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Healthy Pregnancy Habits to Pick Up Now!

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Healthy Habits for Pregnant Women

Pregnant? Congratulations! Now is the perfect time to pick up a few healthy habits if you have yet to do so. ■ WORDS **JOANNA ONG**

It's now or never to cultivate healthy habits to ensure both mother and baby are healthy and strong throughout the pregnancy. Since what goes into your body or what you do with your body is crucial to the healthy development of your baby, it's super important to develop healthy habits even before you're pregnant. These are some ways to get you started:

Good Sleep Habits

According to Dr Lim Min Yu, consultant OBGYN at Gleneagles Hospital, sleep quality matters. Try to avoid stimulants before bedtime such as coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks. Watching television or surfing the internet can also be stimulating, so it is actually a good sleep habit to avoid doing these things in bed. Relaxation techniques, such as yoga, stretching, visualisation or deep breathing can help to prepare you for a good night's rest.

Slow Down

This might be especially difficult for the Singaporean lifestyle but Dr Ann

Tan, OBGYN at Women Fertility & Fetal Centre in Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre advises mums to try to slow down the pace of life as pregnancy does take a toll on a woman's body. According to Dr Tan, the blood volume increases during pregnancy and thus the heart has to work harder to pump the increased volume throughout the whole body. You might also feel relatively anaemic and as a result, feel breathless more often and tire more easily. Thus, it is important to reduce your physical activity.



Exercise Regularly

Slowing down does not mean zero physical activity. In fact, Dr Lim encourages regular exercise as it has many benefits for you and your baby.

Doing gentle exercises help you to cope with changes in your posture and strain on your joints during pregnancy. It also makes it easier for you to get back into shape after your baby is born.

Due to the release of endorphins, exercise can help to boost your mood if you're feeling low. Exercise may also increase your chance of a straightforward labour and birth. He also encourages pelvic floor exercises as your uterus enlarges as your pregnancy progresses and the extra pressure on the pelvic floor can make them feel weaker than usual. Hormonal changes during pregnancy can also cause your pelvic floor to relax slightly. Weak pelvic floor muscles put you at risk of developing urinary incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse. You can help to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles by doing pelvic floor exercises, or Kegels, regularly throughout your pregnancy.

Dr Christopher Ng, OBGYN at GynaeMD Women's & Rejuvenation Clinic at Camden Medical Centre recommends some other exercises that pregnant women can do:

- **Walking** – It is gentle on the joints but at the same time involves most muscle groups from legs and arms to the back.

- **Riding a stationary bike** – The risk of falling off your bicycle due to balancing problems as the pregnancy advances is avoided.
- **Low impact aerobic exercises** – Ideal for women who wish to push themselves a little more.
- **Swimming** – Buoyancy from the water utilises most of the body's muscles without the impact stresses on the joints. Water also reduces the risk of heat exhaustion.
- **Running or jogging** – It's fine if you were doing this routinely before getting pregnant. Do remember to reduce the distance or keep the same distance but run at a slower pace so as not to overstrain yourself.
- **Prenatal yoga** – An excellent way to improve one's posture, muscle tone and strength. It's also a good method to relieve backaches and muscle strains during pregnancy.
- **Warm up and cool down** – Ample time is needed before commencing exercise and after an exercise routine. This will reduce the risk of overstraining muscles, ligaments and joints as well as preventing the body from overheating.

Eat and Hydrate Well

According to Dr Tan, an increase in protein and fluid intake is necessary to provide the necessary growth factors for the baby and ensure good hydration to allow the amniotic fluid and maternal circulation to be well supported. A high sugar and carbohydrate diet is detrimental as the blood sugars might become too high and cause gestational diabetes. Wherever possible eat small meals more frequently when pregnant to reduce bloating and regurgitation.

7 Ways to Avoid Gaining Too Much Weight During Pregnancy



SCAN TO READ NOW!

DR LIM MIN YU GIVES SOME TIPS ON HOW TO EAT AND HYDRATE WELL



Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily.



For starchy foods such as rice, noodles, bread and pasta, choose wholegrain varieties e.g. brown rice rather than white, so you get plenty of fibre.



Get your daily servings of protein, such as fish, lean meat, eggs, beans, nuts or pulses.



Don't forget to include dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt.



Take folic acid as it reduces the risk of your baby developing a neural tube defect such as spina bifida.



Aim to drink 1.5 to 2 litres of water each day.

Prenatal care

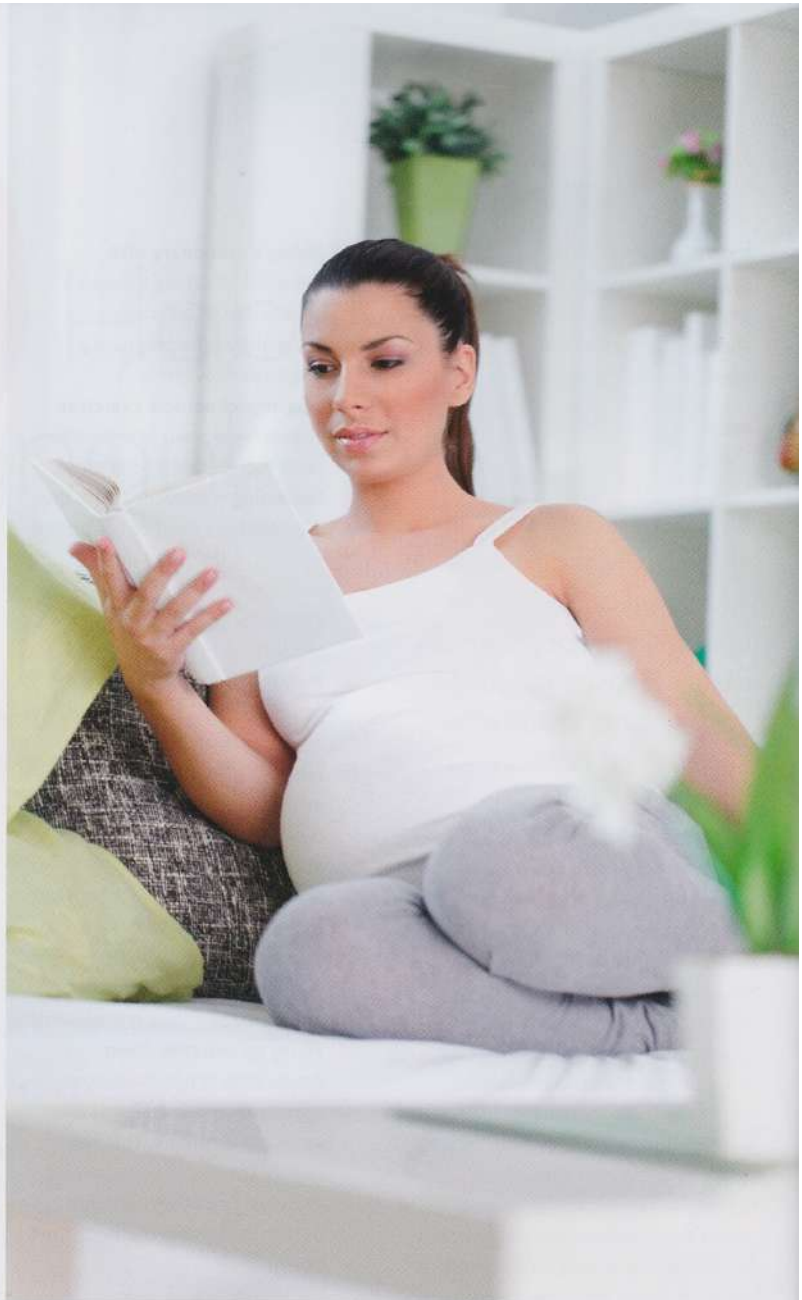
Dr Ng encourages couples to be actively involved in making decisions about their antenatal care. During your pregnancy, you will be given a series of antenatal appointments to check on your health and your baby. Becoming a parent is a major commitment filled with many challenges, rewards, and decisions. Making healthy choices during your antenatal visit is an important step to a healthy and happy pregnancy so setting aside ample time for the visit and going as a couple is always a good idea. Your obstetrician will want details about your past pregnancies, menstrual cycle, use of contraceptives and allergies or other medical conditions. You should inform him if you are currently consuming any medication. It is imperative that you highlight any significant family history of congenital abnormalities or genetic diseases as this may affect your current pregnancy.

Take it Easy on Chores

Dr Ng advises that you know your limits and do the chores that won't strain your back so much (otherwise employ a helper or if you cannot afford one then there is always your husband).

Cut Down on Work Trips

Being pregnant doesn't mean you have to give up work unless you are an air stewardess or your work involves high impact contact or is risky, Dr Ng cautions. Take frequent breaks at work to snack or just put your feet up. Many pregnant women work throughout their pregnancy until they go into labour or up to the last one to two weeks before their due date. If your work involves frequent travelling then perhaps it's better to cut down on the unnecessary business trips.



A Definite No-no!

These are some bad habits that need to be eliminated especially during pregnancy. Dr Lim highlights a few below:

Smoking

Smoking during pregnancy can cause serious health problems for you and your baby. Smoking increases your baby's risk of intrauterine growth restriction, low birthweight, preterm birth, stillbirth and sudden infant

death syndrome (SIDS) or "cot death". Smoking also increases the risk of miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy and placental abruption, where the placenta separates from the wall of the uterus before your baby is born. If you smoke, it's best to stop, for your own health and that of your baby. The sooner you stop smoking, the better, but it's never too late. Even stopping in the last few weeks of your pregnancy can benefit you both.